

Center for Strategic and International Studies

TRANSCRIPT

Into Africa

“Partnerships for Peace: The Global Fragility Act”

DATE

Thursday, July 25, 2024

FEATURING

Peter Quaranto

Director, Office of African Affairs Department of State Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations

CSIS EXPERTS

Mvemba Phezo Dizolele

Senior Fellow and Director, Africa Program, CSIS

*Transcript By
Rev Transcript
www.rev.com*

Mvemba Phezo
Dizolele:

Welcome to Into Africa. My name is Mvemba Phezo Dizolele. I'm a senior fellow and the director of the Africa Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. This is a podcast where we talk everything Africa, politics, economics, security, and culture. Welcome. In 2019, the United States Congress passed the Bipartisan Global Fragility Act, also known as GFA. To this Act, Congress approved up to \$200 million annually for prevention and stability effort in the target countries and regions, which include Mozambique and Coastal West Africa, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, and Togo.

True collaboration with state government, civil society actors, and other key stakeholders. They developed 10-year plans starting in 2022 for each target country. The goal of the GFA as described by the State Department is to strengthen fragile states, quote, where state weakness or failure would magnify threats to the American homeland, end of quote, could empower reform-minded government people and civil society end of quote. When it comes to Coastal West Africa, there are several key sources of instability outlined in the plans that need to be addressed. While Ghana is often seen as a relatively stable democracy, it's Coastal West African neighbors face issues of governmental legitimacy due to corruption, lack of strong accountability mechanism and so on.

But even Ghana itself is facing its own challenges that if left unchecked will undermine peace and security. The region is also highly at risk of spillover from its neighbors in the Sahel and other West African countries where armed extremist groups are more active. So, the United States has taken its own initiative and engaging with these countries in these various spaces that I just mentioned. The main objective for the GFA implementation here in West Africa include increasing social cohesion, improve government responsiveness and accountability, and improve security force responsiveness and accountability.

These are major issues that need to be handled. Major challenges. Joining me today to discuss these issues and how they affect Africa is Peter Quaranto who serves as the Director of the Office of African Affairs in the Department of State Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations. That is a muffle in this capacity, Quaranto oversees CSOs work to support US diplomacy across Sub-Saharan Africa to anticipate, prevent, and respond to violent conflict. He concurrently serves as a senior advisor for the bureau and the department effort to advance the Global Fragility Act, particularly its implementation, the new approaches to break the costly cycle of conflict and fragility.

Peter also served on the White House National Security Council staff from 2021 to 2022 as director for the Horn of Africa and Great Lakes regions, which of course are themselves very unstable regions. Peter Quaranto:, welcome to Into Africa

Peter Quaranto: Mvemba, thanks so much for having me. Thanks for this opportunity to come on the show. And greetings to all of your listeners.

Mvemba Phezo Dizolele: Greetings to you. GFA. Why is it important, why does it matter? And what is this Bureau of Conflict stabilization operations in which you find yourself?

Peter Quaranto: I think this is a really critical time to be talking about issues of conflict and peace. By many metrics conflict related violence around the world is at the highest levels that we've seen since the end of the Cold War, and I don't need to tell you and tell your listeners that those conflicts are having staggering humanitarian and economic consequences. Of course, these trends are manifesting acutely in Africa from Sahel to Sudan to the eastern DRC as you noted. I work for the Conflict and Stabilization Operations Bureau at the State Department CSO for short. That's a bit easier to say.

We're a small, but I think small but mighty Bureau at the State Department that provides technical support to US policy makers and US diplomats that are working on conflict challenges. And as you said in your introduction, our goal is to help the US government to better anticipate, prevent and mitigate violent conflicts. That is no easy mission, but it is what we are engaged in. And we have been working over the last decade that the bureau has been in existence to cultivate a suite of capabilities and tools that can help the US government in this regard.

So we have advanced analytics tools. We are able to do armed actor mapping, tabletop exercises and other kinds of planning. We house a dedicated negotiation support unit at the department and we assign staff that provide critical surge support to US embassies, US special envoys and special task forces at the State Department. So one example I, I just wanna say at the top, we are very focused right now on the situation in Sudan, the appalling Civil War there.

And we are providing support for ongoing efforts to try to expose conflict atrocities, to try to facilitate and lay the groundwork for what we hope will eventually be a cessation of hostilities and perhaps most importantly, to lay the groundwork for an inclusive peace process that can bring civilians and civilian voices forward. There's clearly a need

to renew and enhance international capabilities for mediating and resolving these types of, of conflicts. At the same time, I think what we know from research and experience is that we also need to be investing more in prevention, in partnerships and in strategic peace building to try to build sustainable peace in places around the world. And the Global Fragility Act, which I'm excited to talk about today, is providing us with the impetus and the resources to be engaging in prevention and strategic peace building in ways that in my career in government, we have not done before. And it's a very exciting time to be doing this. As you mentioned, focusing in particular on the Coastal West Africa sub-region and Mozambique.

Mvemba Phezo
Dizolele:

Very well. The capabilities that you've described appear to be heavy and heavily bureaucratic. You know, as the state department conflicts are very dynamic, the case of Sudan, you know, it's like wildfire. It start and then just spread very quickly. If you're going to anticipate, you face certain challenges in that, right? We can see conflict come, but in terms of preventing them and in mitigating them, we need speed. How does that work from where you stand? You know, the people instigate conflict, they have different impetus.

Peter Quaranto:

I think we need speed. I also think we need creativity and I think we need strategic patience in some cases and a, and a commitment to focus on these issues for the long term. So a big part of our role is trying to have people that are available to surge support for peace processes and openings where they exist, where the United States has an opportunity or is being asked to move forward, uh, in terms of helping to facilitate peaceful resolution of conflict.

At the same time, what we have not done in the past to the extent that we believe we need to, is be looking at those places where there are opportunities to partner with African leaders, with African communities to be engaging, seriously, engaging in strategic peace building where we are better understanding the factors that may make a place susceptible or vulnerable to future threats, to future instability, and to be making investments in ensuring up peace where it, where it's possible. Social cohesion, responsive governance and better and more accountable security forces.

And the decision to focus on Coastal West Africa, which at this time not feel as significant a couple of years ago was a big, big choice that was made. One that we typically don't, we tend to focus on where there is acute violence and acute crisis and the decision was made by the White House to focus on this important region where the US has

critical partnerships as critical interests and where we saw an opportunity to be seriously engaged in prevention.

Mvemba Phezo
Dizolele:

I'll come back to West Coastal Africa in a little bit, but I want to go back just to the three pillars that you mentioned. Anticipate, prevent and mitigate. Africa, I mean, you talk here about West Coastal Africa, it's big enough, but Africa itself, it's, it's quite big. You have worked in the region for a number of years now. How do you anticipate these contingencies that pop up?

Peter Quaranto:

I think the peace building community, the peace community has come a long way in our research and analytic capabilities to look at the conditions that make particular societies more susceptible to violent conflict and political instability. There's some great quantitative and qualitative indices. Many of them are open to the public, the track, various conditions and indicators in different places. And so the anticipation of those places that are seeing greater vulnerability, that work I don't think is as hard as it used to be because I think we've come a long way.

What's really hard is how do we do the prevention work? Once you've identified a place like Coastal West Africa that is seeing these heightened threats from its neighbors in the Sahel region and is clearly where democratic institutions, governance institutions are facing fundamental strains, what are the types of investments, the types of approaches, types of partnerships that can make a real difference? I think that's the area where we've been trying to make the biggest leaps in terms of our understanding of what works and the practical tools of how do we do that? How do we do prevention?

Mvemba Phezo
Dizolele:

In that case you did talk about a suite of capabilities that your bureau and the presumed US government has. I suppose these are technical, you can tell us a little more about those, but also how do they align with the reality? So even the way you communicate from a place like Washington, DC may actually not be aligned with the way people on the ground are analyzing what's happening to them, right? The terminology itself can be a problem.

Peter Quaranto: Yeah, I, I will say I don't love the title, the Global Fragility Act. Talk to some of the congressional staff and wish there had been a different name, but at the time it was what made sense to move that initiative forward. Subsequent to the Global Fragility Act, we've put forward what we call the strategy to prevent conflict and promote stability. And for us it's really about partnerships. Partnerships for peace and partnerships for prevention.

And so we're not focusing on that terminology and I agree with you, it often doesn't resonate, or it isn't as descriptive as we want it to be in terms of what we're really engaged in with this initiative. But let me step back and talk about with this initiative what it is that we are trying to do and how we are trying to do it that's different. So the first part of this process has been really investing in analysis, in listening and planning. So we had teams integrated US government teams led by our embassies, which have provided tremendous leadership for this initiative that spent almost a year engaging with partners in the countries of coast to West Africa and Mozambique to hear from them how they saw the evolving challenges and threats and opportunities, what they viewed as the most promising locally driven solutions and strategies for peace.

We incorporated those into whole of government plans. Those plans are available now on the State Department website if people are interested in learning more about what we're doing. And we're trying to carry forward that engagement through our diplomacy as part of this. The diplomacy is a critical part of implementing this initiative. It's about how we stay in dialogue with partners, not just government partners, but also civil society, academia, religious leaders, a whole cross section of society that are part of multi-stakeholder solutions in these places.

And then what we've done, and thanks to the Global Fragility Act, thanks to the bipartisan supporting Congress is we've been able to marshal a tremendous amount of resources to support new and expanded peace building and peace oriented programming. So since this initiative started, we've committed over \$350 million in stability focused assistance for Coastal West Africa and Mozambique and our embassies are using that funding to expand a range of creative pro peace partnerships and programs.

Mvemba Phezo
Dizolele:: When I read the message from the Secretary of State regarding this uh, Global Fragility Act, he said United States is committed to strengthening global resiliency and democratic renewal, promoting peaceful, self-reliant nation that becomes strong economic and

security partners capable of addressing shared challenges. When you talk about partnership, one of the question that those of us who analyze these spaces that comes up often is, who exactly are we partnering with?

So you mentioned a lot United States embassy. We know that when you go, especially these days anywhere in Africa, US embassies are fortresses hard to get in, hard to come out of it. Hard to get in because just for security purposes, you cannot just access those whichever way you want. These are not temples or churches you just walk into.

Peter Quaranto: Right.

Mvemba Phezo
Dizolele:

Hard to come out because diplomat themselves live under tremendous restrictions. Don't go over here, don't go over there. So at the outset, it's obviously set the limit in terms of the partnership. We the United States end up talking to the people in power. So if we talk about security is often means the government, sometime the same government or defense institution or security are part of this dynamics that is causing instability. We talk a lot about civil society, but they're not always accessible because of the uh, conditions that I mentioned just a few seconds ago.

How do we circumvent that? We meaning the international committee, particularly in your case CSO, in engaging with those actors, right? They're the ones who have the analysis as it happens in the most dynamic ways. They know who's doing what, where they often see what, even those of us in places like CSIS do not see unless we go on the ground, go to the villages, go up North in places like you go like, I didn't know this, but everybody else does. The women at the market know this, but we don't go to the market.

Peter Quaranto: No, I think you raise a really crucial point and a really crucial challenge that we face in trying to understand the political economies of conflicts or conflict risks in the places where we're working and trying to forge these kinds of partnerships. A big part of this initiative is getting out to conflict affected areas, hearing from a cross section of society and really trying to build mutually beneficial partnerships where we are supporting those locally led efforts. Let me give you an example of how I think we're trying to do this.

I was in Mozambique in March with the assistant secretary of, of the CSO bureau and we got to see firsthand how our embassy in Mozambique using some of the funding and the impetus provided by this initiative are expanding their engagement in Cabo Delgado and Nampula and Niassa provinces. They're using the programming and

the funding that's available to engage a wide array of young people, of women leaders, of environmental leaders of local government. And what I think is really exciting is not just those individual engagements, but the fact that we're actually bringing people together. At the heart of the vision for this initiative is not that the United States is forging better partnerships, but it's that we're facilitating a broader set of partnerships for peace in these places. And so we're connecting members of civil society, we're connecting government and civil society. And in fact, a lot of the programming that we're doing in Coastal West Africa in particular is focused on the relationship between security forces and communities.

It's a recognition. Something that I think we've all learned from our engagement in other places is if we don't put more of a focus on how security forces are perceived by communities, by how they interact with those communities, whether they have trust, whether they have levels of communication, whether there's accountability, then that can often be a fuel for future conflict and instability and certainly doesn't take us closer to lasting peace. So we are trying to get out, we are trying to engage in new and creative ways. I think we're doing that and I think we're also trying to build these broader coalitions in support of prevention and peace.

Mvemba Phezo
Dizolele:

In terms of money, you talked about \$350 million that's been invested in the stability focus processes or tools. What are those tools and where does the money go?

Peter Quaranto:

So that money is a combination of two things. First of all, pursuant to the Global Fragility Act law, Congress authorized the establishment of a s- new fund called the Prevention and Stabilization Fund. And Congress has now, if I, my memory serves me correctly, Congress has now appropriated four years funding for that specific fund. And a significant part of that global fund has been provided to these focus partnerships in Sub-Saharan Africa. What's really significant about the prevention and stabilization fund, as you know, so much of US foreign assistance to Sub-Saharan Africa is tied to specific earmarks and directives.

So we put a lot of money into health, we put a lot of money into education, we put a lot of money into some other broader development imperatives and rightly so. Those are really important areas and I think we've got a lot of great results over the years from those types of investments. But what our embassies often tell us is we need more flexible resources that we can put towards an array of programs that are dealing with issues of governance, dealing with

issues of social cohesion, issues of conflict resolution and peace building.

And this fund has given us those flexible resources to do that and it's been very catalytic in that regard. At the same time, what we've been working to do, and this is what the Act asks us to do as well, is to align other resources that the US government has toward these plans that were put out by the White House and towards strengthening these partnerships. And so in particular, we've worked with the Department of Defense to make sure that its security tools, its security assistance is better aligned with this agenda in Coastal West Africa and Mozambique. And we're also working closely with other parts of the US government, like the Millennium Challenge Corporation or the Development Finance Corporation.

To give you an example, just some examples of the types of programming that we're doing. So in Mozambique, we're working with local government officials on expanding basic services for communities in war torn areas of Northern Mozambique. We're supporting independent media, community radio stations and enabling them to increase their reach and access. And then we're promoting social cohesion and skills building, particularly for youth through things like peace clubs, sports, the arts. In the case of Northern Mozambique, we're very proud to be involved in constructing a new secondary school in Pemba and a whole set of programming around that secondary school, which is hopefully going to be part of this broader recovery process.

And then in Coastal West Africa, similarly, we're engaged in programs that are helping to strengthen the government's abilities to provide services to historically marginalized areas. In the northern part of some of these Coastal states, we are strengthening dispute resolution, conflict resolution committees and we're improving the dialogue and the trust building and the relationships between community leaders, government and civil society. And what's so exciting about Coastal West Africa is the leadership that these countries are providing. They are embracing a holistic, inclusive approach that puts people first, that puts inclusion first. And so through this effort, we're really trying to get behind their vision, which is another important part of this approach.

Mvemba Phezo
Dizolele:

So a couple things there. This prevention and stabilization fund, is it in addition to the \$350 million?

Peter Quaranto: No, it is a portion of the \$350 million is being fueled by the prevention and stabilization fund.

Mvemba Phezo Dizolele: In terms of the partnership you just mentioned, these countries are taking the leadership. I think this is part of the challenges that I was referring to, what we see from Washington and what happens on the ground. I was in Ghana last year, I was there recently as well, but I was there last year and was doing this podcast in Ghana, in a studio there up in Legon, East Legon in Accra. And I proceeded by describing Ghana, the Ghana that we read in the newspaper, stable Democracy, economy, this economy that.

And after I finish introducing the subject, my guest looks at me and says, "I'm not sure you describing the right country. It's very interesting to hear you describe Ghana this way." And we proceeded to talk and all of a sudden a lot of fault lines start emerging even in a country like Ghana. So that if you're reading the IMF report, you get a different set of things and you get a different perspective. Your horizon looks very differently. Whereas when you start talking to security analysts, civil society groups on the ground, it's a totally different country that has nothing to do with what I read. And I was very happy to have gone there. And since they have returned and it's been confirmed over and over. So I wanna push you back a little bit and who are we engaging and how we further this because the Secretary of State in his message said, we want to promote democratic renewal. And democratic renewal doesn't happen if the people themselves don't feel like it's happening.

Peter Quaranto: I think we are very eyes wide open about the political challenges that exist in many of these countries where we are partnering. Part of what we are trying to do through this initiative is have an expanded dialogue with leaders in countries like Ghana, Togo, Benin, Mozambique, about what are the steps that they seek to take that they need to be taking to move toward a more inclusive stability. And in many cases, that is a conversation about freedom of speech, a freedom of expression.

It is a conversation about how are they working with the young people in their countries? Are young people included? Are there economic opportunities? Is there a vision for their inclusion in the future? And we seek through our diplomatic engagement to encourage them to take the steps that they need to take. Now is that a short-term overnight process? No. And several of these countries are approaching really important elections. So we're very focused on that. I mean,

Ghana will have very consequential elections at the end of the year. Mozambique will have elections in October.

Côte d'Ivoire will have elections sometime next year. These are gonna be major milestones that we will be watching closely. We are engaging in part, using some of the programming that we're doing under this initiative to promote conditions that we hope will allow those elections to go forward in more inclusive, fair, and free ways. But I think at the heart of this, this is about a dialogue with these countries about what they can get accomplished, where they wanna go in the future, and how willing they are to match some of their rhetoric in terms of inclusive stability with concrete reforms and actions on the ground.

Mvemba Phezo
Dizolele:

For sure. But it's also about us shifting a little bit, the lines that we look at, right? We look at through how we look at this issue. So in the case of Mozambique, you talked about Cabo Delgado, Naula and Niassa, the engagement that the United States with its partner, uh, the government and civil society undertaking. One element I always find missing when we look at Mozambique is the climate element. You know, we focus on the instability, i.e insurgency, Al-Shabaab, what they're doing. We focus maybe on the weakness of the state not delivering the right public services and so on.

We focus on our security partners, the European Union, what he's doing with Mozambique Defense Forces, the Rwandans who have come to augment. Sadek is living, they already start pulling out because they don't have the resources. But one element that is always missing is the climate element, right? Insurgency is sexy for a set of reasons. People wanna write their PhDs on insurgency. If you are the State Department, it's a good thing to be on Mozambique desk. If you run in, it's good for your own PR and show that your army can work and the list goes on.

If you are oil company, you and oil company, it's good to be in Mozambique because of the tremendous natural gas and oil reserves that they have. The group that is already left out, I feel is the population of Cabo Delgado. You're talking about the what you're doing there. Including the IDPs, the numbers are very high in places like Nampula and thing. These people are being displaced by the climate primarily even before the insurgency. So Mozambique, because of its location, is prone to cyclones and other turbulent weather patterns including flooding. So we know we don't have to predict this.

We know there will be another cyclone in a few months. We know there'll be flooding, we know people will be displaced. We've not as an international community taken this element seriously because I personally have not seen initiatives that have shown that we take the weather pattern as a driver, as a serious driver of that conflict. The weather pattern reinforces the narrative of the insurgent because it's tapped right into the discontent of the populations. Should we maybe start talking to the Dutch to help these people build better homes? Should we start promoting more climate smart crops for these populations? Are we doing anything in that space?

Because that obviously when we talk about Niassa, Nampula and Cabo Delgado, it's an important driver of that instability way before the insurgency showed up.

Peter Quaranto: Mvemba, I couldn't agree more. I think that the climate dimension of instability and instability risks across the board in these places is growing. It's a more significant part of the story and we need to be putting more focus on it. Through this effort, we are trying to do that. So when we undertook the analysis and the engagement at the outset of this initiative, we specifically looked at drivers risks and resiliency related to climate and how that could be factored into the approach. And specifically in Mozambique, you're absolutely right, Mozambique is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world to the effects of climate change and extreme weather disruptions.

And so in our engagement with the government and then in some of the programming that we're doing, we're putting a focus on what steps are being taken to help communities to anticipate and adapt to these real climate change related natural disasters. So some of the programming is about helping the Coastal communities to think about how to shift their livelihoods, how to develop more sustainable livelihoods, as well as as you raised, to invest in new approaches to infrastructure, small scale infrastructure that can better withstand some of these shocks.

And this is so important because if we don't address this, it is further going to exacerbate the division that exists within Mozambique, between communities in the North and leaders in the southern part of the country. And at the heart of this effort is about helping Mozambique to bridge these historical regional divides and divisions so that it can have a pathway toward more inclusive stability and more inclusive economic growth. So it can reap the rewards. So all Mozambicans can reap the rewards from the natural resources that exist, especially those that exist in the northern part of the country.

So we're very focused on this, but it's an area that needs more research, it needs more creative thinking. And the last thing I'll say, and this is a bit of a personal take on this, is we also have a tendency to think about climate primarily from a threat standpoint. So we think, okay, climate is going to lead to more scarcity, more disruption, and that's going to somehow fuel more conflict, more threats. And so what do we do to just mitigate, it's all about mitigation. And of course that's important. I think we also need to start thinking more about what are the opportunities as these disruptions and changes are taking place to promote new forms of cooperation, to look at systems that have really failed, failed us all in the past.

And start to have the kind of imagination to think about in this new world, in this new moment, how can we kind of bridge divisions and come together to deal with some of these shared threats? So maybe that's a bit naive and optimistic of me, but I think the paradigm matters as we talk about this.

Mvemba Phezo
Dizolele:

I subscribe to the fact that every crisis is an opportunity, right? It's just the way it goes. It doesn't matter how bad it is. The level of rewards if we take this boutique can be just as high as the downside. So it's behooves the international committee to think a little more creatively and particularly to equip those communities to withstand their, the risk and the shock that comes with that. This is their home. I'm sure all of them want to stay there, but we don't give them the support that they need. Let's move back to West Coastal Africa. You talked earlier when you were talking about the funding, about the flexibility 'cause Congress appropriate funds for specific reasons and sometime there is not a lot of room to maneuver in adjusting the target of those funds. And it can be problematic, especially if there's a lag between the time the project or the funding were approved and the situation on the ground is evolved and changed and we're still trying to find something that may no longer be the most urgent thing and we cannot find the next urgent thing because it's not been appropriated. I think legislation can be equally problematic in other areas. So the Coastal countries that the US want to help or batteries sits right below the Sahel. The Sahel countries are going through the cool wave Mali, we just in Mali a couple months ago. We look at Niger, we look at Burkina Faso, those are all right on the edge with Togo and Côte d'Ivoire and so on because they have the cos over there. We have put sanction a suspension of through 7,008.

We cannot really engage with them as fully as we did before in terms of security assistance. Yet the security of places like Togo and Côte d'Ivoire depend exactly on what's gonna happen in the North. So that

friction, how does your organization address issues like this, either up through the front office at state, or through your friends in Congress and elsewhere, because that's a serious dilemma there.

Peter Quaranto: I think it's critically important that we strive to think holistically about West Africa and think about the interconnections between what's happening in the Sahel, Central Sahel countries and what's happening in what we're calling the Coastal West Africa subregion. I think if I recall correctly, it was your predecessor, some guy named Judd Devermont-

Mvemba Phezo
Dizolele: Devermont.

Peter Quaranto: ... who wrote a paper about three years, so years ago that said it was a false choice to only focus on the Coastal region or only focus on the Sahel. And I take that as an important charge that we need to be engaged in. Look, I think the situations in the Sahel and the situations in Coastal West Africa require different tools. We made the choice and I think it was the right choice. That what the Global Fragility Act, the resources, the approach has offered us in terms of prevention. That is a tool that we are putting to use in terms of our partnerships, the partnerships that are possible in Coastal West Africa, in the Sahel, we are engaged as a government in a process to reassess what is possible in the Sahel and what we can do.

But we are absolutely still trying to engage with governments and especially the populations in those countries in ways that make sense. And to look at coordinated approaches, coordinated programming to the extent possible, recognizing how much is happening in those cross-border areas involving all the countries. I think there are no easy answers here. I think there's need for continued creative thinking in terms of what's possible, what the future holds with regard to the countries in the central Sahel.

And I think what Congress was trying to do with the 708 restrictions in addition to providing a deterrent, a global deterrent against proliferation of coups like this and moves against the will of the people, was also to say that when events like this happen, we can't just continue with business as usual. We need new approaches. It's not to say that we should disengage, but it's to say that we need new approaches. And so I think our challenge right now in the Sahel is to define what that new approach is and to make sure that it lines up well with what we're doing and trying to do in the neighboring Coastal region.

Mvemba Phezo
Dizolele:

Absolutely. But also flexibility in the way we see these things, right? So if you say the will of the people, what is the will of the people you know? Is the will of the people only expressed to the ballot, even though election may be as flawed as we know them to be often in these spaces. When we were in Mali, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung just issued an opinion poll, which was taken actually by the same time we were there January to March. And that Paul says the military enjoys a 99% approval rating, which we got a sense of when we were talking to the people already on the ground.

We didn't have any scientific way to know this, but we did talk to people. It is very obvious to us that the military regime there was very popular. It was very clear that this is not the traditional way of leading or governance. So there's this friction as well. So if we continue in the West or in Washington, say the will of the people is only to ballot where, I mean, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung is not a organization. They're German, they're very much committed to good governance and democracy and so on. But the fact on the ground were that these people are 99% percent.

Now the variation depend on where you are, whether in the conflict zone or not, whether in the urban setting or not. Those are also reality that are, say people like you at the State Department of Congress cannot ignore because otherwise there's a misalignment with the message we're pushing. We say we want to be with the people, we want to sanction the military, but the people are happy with the military. What does that mean? So it's some challenges right there for us.

Peter Quaranto:

I, I, I think we have to be creative as we think about political transitions in the wake of these coups or seizures of power in these countries. At the US Africa Leader Summit at the end of 2022, one of the initiatives that the White House announced was something called Adapt, uh, which stands for the African Democratic and Political Transitions Initiative. And it identified some new money and some new impetus for the US government to not just be kind of sitting back setting standards for what we wanna see in transitions, but to be rolling up our sleeves and trying to do more to help facilitate a transition towards validating the kind of legitimacy of governance that will allow us to get back to a broader partnership.

We've been using the Adapt Initiative and some of the resources in our support to Guinea and support to the political transition in Guinea, which is not without its problems and challenges, but we are absolutely not sort of standing back and waiting. We are engaging, and

I think similarly in in other places on the continent, we're trying to be actively engaged in terms of political transitions more than we have been in the past. And I think as you say, there are some real shortcomings with only thinking about elections as the sole measure of legitimacy.

The flip side, the challenge is what's the alternative? And this is where I think we've struggled as an international community in this regard. I think we need to be creative. I think we need to stand by our principles that's important from an overall standpoint, but continue to engage, continue to engage where we can.

Mvemba Phezo
Dizolele:

Absolutely, countries like the United States should continue to stand by its principles and ideals. But I think also that flexibility calls for us to accept these countries where they are in their own evolution. These African countries, you know, on average the 60 years old, they've never known democracy in the real science of it. These were colonies and colonies were not democracies by any stretch of the imagination. If colonies the last reference they had and 60 years later we expect them to be full fledged democracies, it's a bit challenging, it's a bit unrealistic. But also they're young, right?

Peter Quaranto:

Yeah.

Mvemba Phezo
Dizolele:

These countries on average, Mali median age is 16, literally 16 years old. What are we expecting of this 16-year-old in matter of democracy, which by the way they subscribe to. But we have, uh, about a minute left. Is there any specific other point that you like us to get from what you're trying to engage in?

Peter Quaranto:

I would just say to build on what you're saying, for better or worse, I have spent a lot of my career trying to study the way in which the US government engages, the way we use foreign assistance around the world, but especially in Africa. And what I think we have found over time is that we are most effective with our assistance, our support, our partnership when we are aligned in our vision with our African partners. And I think what's exciting in Coastal West Africa and what's exciting in Mozambique is there is an alignment. It's not perfect, it's not static by any means. It's an ongoing process, but there is an opportunity to align what these countries and their populations are trying to do as it relates to some of these specific peace and conflict challenges.

And to marshal US support and assistance behind that. I think that setup is when we have our best chance to be successful. So stay tuned.

This is a long-term endeavor. It is not meant to be something that achieves success overnight, but it's a new way of doing business and I think it's the right way to do business. And I'm excited about what we can accomplish in the years ahead.

Mvemba Phezo Dizolele: Peter Quaranto, Director at the Conflict and Stabilization Operations Office at the State Department. Thank you for joining us today on Into Africa.

Peter Quaranto: Thanks, Mvemba.

Mvemba Phezo Dizolele: Thank you for listening. We want to have more conversations about Africa. Tell your friends. Subscribe to our podcast at Apple Podcast. You can also read our analysis and report at csi.org/africa. So long.

(END.)